



## HELP YOUR CHILD ESTABLISH SAFE BOUNDARIES

Respecting personal boundaries is an important part of the groundwork in learning personal safety. Individuals who groom children, begin by breaking down their personal barriers. Establishing personal boundaries is a great way for children to help protect themselves.



In order to respect ourselves, be respected and respect the people around us, it is important to know how to set boundaries. Setting boundaries is a symbol of healthy self-esteem and self-worth. It is also a good way to protect yourself and to learn to trust your instincts. Many people, even in adulthood, still have difficulty doing this. We believe it is important, from an early age, to be able to identify and affirm one's boundaries.

Here, three types of boundaries will be addressed: **emotional, physical and virtual**. We will look at the definition of each one, along with an example where the boundaries apply and some tips to make them easier to establish.

**1. Emotional boundaries (verbal and psychological):** Emotional boundaries, as the name suggests, rest on emotions. This is the type of boundary that is most easily crossed, since it remains linked to internal emotions and is characterized by thoughts and words.

Example: Often, young people tend to give each other nicknames that seem disrespectful to us, but which, for them, are considered a sign of affection. For example, they will nickname someone by exaggerating a physical trait, calling them small, fat or stupid, and laugh about it. Often, they do not realize that these terms can be offensive to the other person, especially if that person is sensitive about the physical trait. This is considered a form of bullying.

It is therefore important to remind them that these types of terms represent a lack of respect and that the positive aspect of having friends is to feel respected, fulfilled and safe. Our friends are supposed to support us and make us feel good. Nicknames should therefore emphasize positive qualities that are loved or admired in this person, rather than exaggerating a negative

## HELP YOUR CHILD ESTABLISH SAFE BOUNDARIES

trait. Bullying is never an easy experience for a young person, so imagine when it comes from someone who is supposed to be a friend!

Tip: As an exercise, have your child put him/herself in the other person's shoes. For example, look for a feature that the child doesn't like about themselves and have them imagine that people constantly nickname them based on that particular feature. How would they feel?

Instead, find a positive quality of their friend that can use as a nickname. For example, happy, smiling, generous. For some, it could even be a superhero name! We could end up with Happy Julie... or Generous Maxime. This can also become a fun vocabulary exercise: look together in the dictionary for synonyms of adjectives!

2. **Physical boundaries (personal space, comfort zone):** Physical boundaries, as the name suggests, are related to the body and personal space. They determine how physically close we feel others should be. They also determine the types of physical contact or touch with which we feel comfortable.



It is important to remember that physical boundaries differ from person to person. Thus, some will be more comfortable being near others and others less comfortable. These boundaries can also evolve as people get older.

Example: Probably the most striking example here is the all-too-familiar case of kissing and hugging between family members. Often, this is a tradition going back many generations that is naturally established and considered to be polite. However, many young people become confused about what is acceptable or not, and tend to think they are rude if they refuse this type of physical contact. It is essential to remember that the body of every human being belongs to them. In other words, my body is mine! Thus, everyone has the right to decide how comfortable they are in showing affection and to refuse any physical contact if they don't feel at ease. It is important to not pressure children (e.g., "Go ahead, kiss your uncle or aunt, otherwise it's rude!"). There is a very wide range of behaviours that can replace these types of contacts and allow children to show their affection as they wish, while respecting themselves and others.

## HELP YOUR CHILD ESTABLISH SAFE BOUNDARIES

For teens: Early romantic relationships can also be the first time for specific types of physical contacts. Many teens feel pressured to show their affection in one way or another. They tend to not respect their own boundaries, out of a desire to please their partner and to not be rejected. Here again, it is important to recall the notion of respect for oneself and for others. Demonstrating affection and love can be done in a variety of ways other than through kisses, hugs or other means. It is important here to respect each other's rhythms and to remind them that a person who really loves us and cares about us will always respect our choice.

Tip: Together, make a list of acceptable forms of touching, based on their comfort level (not yours!). Teach your child how to politely refuse by explaining that they are simply not comfortable. Find alternative ways to display affection (shaking hands, high fives, inventing a secret handshake, blowing kisses, etc.)



3. **Virtual boundaries :** Virtual reality permeates today's world. The ability to communicate over the Internet and to be in contact with people abroad is fascinating. It also offers the opportunity to share our personal accomplishments and to stay in touch with loved ones. However, it also opens the door to sharing sensitive information that can fall into the wrong hands.

It is well known fact that most of our children and teenagers now have access to cell phones, computers and tablets, as well as to online video games. Many of them spend the better part of their time on these platforms and share every detail of their private lives, without worrying about who will have access to all those details.

Example: The popular social networks Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok as well as the online games Roblox and Fortnite are growing in popularity with young people. These networks allow them, among other things, to publish photos, videos and share their thoughts on different subjects. However, here is what most people don't know:

1. The **minimum legal age** for having an account on social networks is 13 years old. As a result, many lie on their forms in order to access them. But if a child can lie about their age... so can an adult!
2. Even if their account is set to "**private**", the fact that they are using the Internet means there is no guarantee their information will be kept confidential.



## HELP YOUR CHILD ESTABLISH SAFE BOUNDARIES

3. Here is the information that **should never** be on an account, as it is publicly displayed:

- Name and surname
- Date of birth
- Address (city, province, country)
- Telephone number
- School

4. Everything they post is preserved, whether videos, photos or quotes. Thus, their posts can follow them for years to come. Things posted during their childhood could surface again in adulthood and may cause them prejudice.



5. Many adults use these online platforms to target and abuse vulnerable youth. They tend to pose as young teenagers and interact with them by complimenting them and showing appreciation for their posts, eventually asking them for all sorts of favours.

Then there is the infamous phenomenon of “sexting”, which involves sending sexual images of oneself to another person (ie: a photo taken in underwear, in suggestive poses or even nude photos). It is important to know that this behaviour is actually a criminal act. Thus, it can have serious consequences that can jeopardize their safety and future, including the risk of incurring a criminal record. It can happen between teenagers, but also through social networking platforms with “virtual friends”.

Here are four acts that are recognized by the Criminal Code as child pornography:

1. Solicitation (the act of requesting a photo or video)
2. Production (the fact of taking the photo or video in question)
3. Distribution (sending the photo or video and/or sharing it)
4. Possession (having the photo or video on your phone, computer, tablet, etc., even if it has been removed from the device and the person had not asked to receive it).



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**Tip:** Have a conversation with your children to explain the risks associated with social networks. Keep an eye on your children's online activities and make sure you have access to their accounts. You can also arrange with them to ask you for permission before adding a "friend" to their account. Feel free to simulate scenarios about sharing information, photos and videos, and see how they should act to ensure their safety.